



# BC Conference

*The United Church of Canada*

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## Authorization to Solemnize Marriage

Adoption Date: October 2016  
Modification Date:  
Review Date:

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- For members of the order or ministry who are retired, retained on the roll, or in a non pastoral ministry
- For lay people

*Please note:* Ministry Personnel include: Ordered Ministers, including Designated Lay Ministers, Student Candidates and Retired Supply Ministers, who are called or appointed to a Ministry Unit. For Ministry Personnel, the licence to solemnize marriages is automatically granted through the Executive Secretary, and there is no need to make special application. This also applies to a United Church Chaplain of the Canadian Armed Services upon receipt of a request from the Chaplain through the BC Conference Pastoral Relations Working Group.

### **Preamble**

The BC Conference policy for the granting of marriage licences is to assist the local Ministry Unit (or community of faith) in its marriage ministry.

Traditionally, the Ministry Unit and its called or appointed Ministry Personnel have been assisted in their marriage ministry by others licensed to solemnize marriages, mostly retired personnel. There continues to be a need in BC Conference for these services to be available. For the most part, these people will be Ministry Personnel who have both the training, experience and calling to lead worship and to conduct marriage preparation. However, there may be circumstances when a Ministry Unit will request that a lay person be licensed to solemnize marriages.

Therefore, the policy is intended to be a permissive policy which allows for the Ministry Unit to sponsor from within its midst other people (ordered and lay) to solemnize marriages.

### **Some basic understandings**

The Ministry Unit (or Community of Faith or Outreach Ministry recognized by BC Conference Pastoral Relations Committee) through its Governing Body has authority for the provision and expression of public worship, including Marriage Services.

The BC Conference, through the Executive Secretary, has the authority to request from the Department of Vital Statistics through the 'Marriage Act', a provincial licence for those appointed to carry out such a function.

The BC Government through the Marriage Act requires that all marriages be recorded in the Marriage Registry which is provided to Ministry Units within British Columbia by the BC Government upon the request of the Executive Secretary. When the Executive Secretary applies for the marriage registration, the Executive Secretary provides the full name of the Ministry Personnel, their residence, pastoral title, phone number and Ministry Unit (or Community of Faith or Outreach Ministry recognized by BC Conference Pastoral Relations Committee) where the marriage will be recorded. Incorporated ministries will be required to obtain their own Marriage Register from the BC Government.

It should be noted that these are religious and spiritual services provided by the Church. If a couple wishes a non-religious service, they should be advised to contact a marriage commissioner.

### **Procedures for application to the BC Conference**

The Governing Body of the Ministry Unit will seek the approval of the Presbytery Executive through the local Conference Minister. The request for a licence to solemnize marriage within its bounds of the Ministry Unit will then be forwarded to the Conference Executive Secretary.

1. Process for New Applicants:
  - a. The Ministry Unit receives the application form and forwards to the applicant
  - b. The applicant forwards the application to their Presbytery Executive through the Presbytery Conference Minister.
  - c. The Presbytery Executive forwards the application the BC Conference Executive for action

## 2. Process of Yearly Renewals:

- a. The Ministry Unit receives the renewal form and forwards to the applicant
- b. The applicant fills in the form and forwards the application to the Ministry Unit for approval
- c. The Ministry Unit forwards the application to the BC Conference Executive for action.

The Governing Body will assure that the following documented policy and procedures are in place:

2. That the person is in good standing within the congregation (or in the case of Outreach Ministry within the United Church of Canada)
3. That the Governing Body has established guidelines for Marriage Services within its bounds which include their own policies and procedures for the following:
  - The nature and the content of any Marriage Preparation
  - The guidelines for whom and where marriage services will be conducted
  - The guidelines for the content of the marriage services (\*\*\*)It is understood that the Marriage Licence approved through the United Church of Canada is for the purposes of conducting Christian Worship, and that the licence is not approved for non-religious ceremonies, it is also understood that no more than two lay persons' licenses to solemnize marriages will be granted at one time to one congregation).
  - The basis of remuneration, and procedure for payment of staff
  - The availability and oversight of the Marriage Registry, which is provided to the Ministry Unit by the provincial government.
4. That all lay persons holding a licence through the Ministry Unit are appropriately trained and supervised according to the guidelines established by BC Conference.

It is understood that the request for a licence to solemnize marriages, other than for the person in paid accountable ministry in a Ministry Unit is renewed annually. This will normally be done by March 30 of each year, although applications would be accepted at other times.

It is further understood that Ministry Personnel not in paid accountable ministries within a Ministry Unit (or outreach ministry) would not hold a licence to solemnize a marriage unless it was requested through the local Ministry Unit (or equivalent) and renewable each year upon application.

### **Practical steps for the Ministry Unit: prior to March each year**

1. Review the Ministry Unit policies in regard to marriage ministry, including an assessment of the need for additional licences to solemnize marriages.
2. Contact persons currently licensed to solemnize marriages through the Ministry Unit to determine their willingness to continue.
3. Invite current licensees to reflect on their call to marriage ministry.

**There is a ruling by the General Secretary** that where a Ministry Personnel is in a pastoral relationship with a Ministry Unit the Ministry Personnel must always comply with that Congregation's policies in all marriage ceremonies conducted by that minister.